

headman's fowls had been driven to make room for them, and next morning Carter collected some wing feathers and some bits of wood, and made a windmill to amuse the children who swarmed about the compound. Presently there arrived the headman, who saw the toy spinning in the breeze, and anxiously it. He and White-Man's Trouble arranged one another with much noise and gesture, and then there was a bustle in the village, and the cooking fires burned strongly. The headman's gloom had dropped from him like a discarded cloth; he wore in its place an air of oily obsequiousness that showed he could be quite the courtier upon occasion.

"They bragged that morning on no more Kaniki," said White-Man's Trouble, pointing to the three great bowls, "dem hen-chops, dem monkey-chop, an' dem dug-chop."

"Quack-quack dug?"
"No, bow-wow dug."
"Ugh!" said Carter, "I'll leave these rich dainties to you and His Nibs there. Let me have a go at the stewed fowl. Great Christopher! No wonder rubber's so hard to collect in this country when they use up so much to make legs for their chickens. Well, thank heaven for sound teeth and a tough inside!"

"I tell dem headman," said the Krooby when they had started their day's march, "that dem windmill will be fine ju-ju. I say to him, 'You savvy dem flight at Smooth River factory?' An' he savvy plenty. All the bush savvy the ju-ju right. So I tell him me an' you, we keep dem Okky-men away by ourselves, an' shoot most of them, an' kill more by dem talking-god. So dem headman savvy we plenty-big ju-ju men, an' we not fit eat kaniki for breakfast."

"My dear Trouble, your powers of diplomacy are only equalled by your personal appearance. Keep it up. If your eloquence can carry us through the country on the free hotel list it will save a lot of trouble both for us and for everybody else we come near. I like to think of myself as an adventurous knight exploring the black heart of Africa, but I suppose in the States they'd call us a pair of hoboes, and send the watch-dogs at us—Gee! Look at that!"

The rifle dropped to Carter's shoulder and cracked. A herd of small deer were crossing the narrow road ahead of them, and one of them tripped and fell, and there was payment for their next night's lodging.

Thirteen days' march, all ben Hosslein had called it, to the hill where an unnamed river scoured the foot of a red-streaked bluff, and Carter, who was lean and strong and wiry, flattered himself on being able to walk as well as the Moslem in Hausaland. But the fact remained that more than three times thirteen days passed before they reached the place, and the perils of the way proved many and clamorous. In some of the villages the headmen proved hospitable; in others they would have neither truck nor dealings with any callers whatever.

The country was full of war and unrest, and there was no doubt that it was desperately poor. The cassava grounds were unharmed, the millet was unscathed, the banana gardens were wantonly slashed and ruined. The small bush farmer is a creature of nerves, and he stands adversely badly. Put him under a strong over-lord, and he will serve gladly and efficiently. Leave him to himself, and when things go awry with him for too many weeks together, he is apt to suddenly give up the struggle, and sit down with chin on his knees, and quietly starve to death. One cannot reckon far upon the moods of a man who is ridiculously unenthusiastic over his own life or his neighbors'.

But at one place they marched in upon red war.

The village lay amongst its farm lands in a break of the forest, and the gnps between the houses had been filled with thorns. Shots came from it at intervals, and were answered by the shots of invisible marksmen who lay within the edge of the forest. The sun glared high overhead in a fleckless sky. The air was salt with the smoke of the crude trade powder.

White-Man's Trouble counseled retreat.

"Yes, that's all right," said Carter irritably. "No one wants to ram his head into a scrap less than I do. But where the deuce can we go to? There's been no single branch to this road we've come along, and the bush on each side is about the thickest in Africa. Nothing short of a regiment of men with matchlocks would make a path through it anywhere. Going back to that last village means getting skewered. All the way along I've been wondering how on earth we got out of it without having at least ten spears jammed into each of us."

"O Carter, I say, to go get mixed in dem fight, palaver."

"You're so beastly unoriginal. Why go on repeating the same thing? I'd like further to point out that we've not had a bite to eat for twenty-four hours, and I personally can't go on living on my own fat without inconvenience, as you seem to do."

"No savvy."

"Well, to translate, I say I plenty-much fit for chop."

White-Man's Trouble rubbed the waistband of his trousers tenderly.

"Me too," he admitted.
"Then, as there is only starvation and other unpleasant things behind, I'm going ahead to prospect. Gee! There's somebody on this side with a rifle. And, by Christopher, there's another rifle in the village shooting back!"

The flintlock trade guns roared out at intervals, and every now and again there came the sharp bark of smokeless powder, and its clean whop-when of a bullet from a modern rifle. By careful watching Carter decided that there was a spy on each side, and he further made out that one was bombarding the other to the exclusion of all lesser interests.

Now when a man has hunger gnawing at the inside of his ribs, and knows, moreover, that any movement in retreat will be fatal, it does not take much to inspire him to an advance. So Carter went cautiously ahead, keeping well under the fringe of the cover, and White-Man's Trouble, who was copiously afraid, and who muttered evil things under his breath in Kroo, hung on to the remains of the Gladstone bag and crouched along at his heels.

Carter took a step at a time, and was cautious always not to rustle a leaf or tread on a dead branch. So he snatched his way ahead, and when the

Krooby, with less dexterity, blundered and made the shadow of a noise, he turned upon him with such a look of ferocity that it awed even so cross-grained a person as White-Man's Trouble. A dozen times Carter nearly walked on to the heels of one or other of the attacking force, and as often drew off unnoticed; and at last he made his way to the place where he had located the rifle fire, and was closing in on it from behind, when of a sudden he was confronted with a rifle muzzle which suddenly spurted up from the middle of a clump of bush.

It swung up till it covered the left side of his chest, and hung steadily there for an appreciable number of seconds, and then a very well-known voice said, "Well, Mr. Carter, I congratulate you on keeping your nerve in spite of the climate."

"Gee!" said Carter under his breath. "That's old Swizzle-Stick Smith."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said I'm sure that's Mr. Smith."

A bald head, garnished with an eyeglass, shaggy gray hair and a shaggy beard, came forth. "May I ask what you are doing here? Thrown up your commission by any chance?"

"Exactly that."

"On your own?"

"Well, sir, starvation's my master at present."

"Oh, I beg pardon. Go into the mess and order what you'll have. Or look here, I've shot my man, so I'm free for the moment, and I'll come with you. Whiskey we're out of, but I can recommend gin and soda. We looted a sparklet machine, by the way, from the Frenchman."

They worked cautiously back from the firing line, and came upon a mean lean-to of boughs and thatch which Mr. Smith referred to as "my headquarters." As the mess-berget happened to be away, Mr. Smith kindly produced from under the eaves a damp slab of translucent cassava bread, which was obviously all the place contained in the way of food, and extracting a square-faced bottle from a green box of trade gin, poured out half a calabash full, added muddy water from a chatty, and offered it to his guest.

"Come to think of it, that's more healthy for you than soda. Mr. Carter, so you're not up here on O'Neill and Craven's service, you tell me?"

"No; handed in my papers, sir. I'm passing through here on urgent private affairs."

Mr. Smith put a hand inside his shabby pyjama coat and produced a piece of new black watered silk ribbon, on the end of which was an eyeglass. He screwed this in place, and stared at his guest.

"Ah, then in that case, Mr. Carter, I shall have to hear more of your projects before I can give you permission to pass through my territory."

Carter stiffened. "Your territory? Oh, I remember. You've been buying up rubber lands, of course, for the firm."

"As a point of fact, I have not been worrying about the firm very lately. When I said 'my territory,' I meant exactly that, neither more nor less. Later I may turn it over to British protection. But recently it was no man's land, and as that infernal blackguard, the King of Okky, was after it, I seized it for myself."

"Hear, hear," said Carter. "As the King of Okky was once indecently keen on adding my head to his private collection, I can never be really fond of that man, somehow."

"Confound your head, sir! That had nothing to do with it. I didn't quarrel with the man for following out his ordinary African methods. I'm going for him for letting in the French."

Carter was clearly puzzled. "What on earth have the French to do with it?"

"Exactly what they had to do with all the British West African colonies. We hold a seaboard, and when the men on the spot try to consolidate an influence in the hinterland, our Foreign Office promptly truckles to the Anti-British party. The Anti-British party says, 'Oh no, we mustn't make a sphere of influence there. The Germans want it, or the French have set their minds on it, or why shouldn't poor dear Portugal have a chance there. But whatever you do, don't give it to the greedy Great Britain.' And unless the hands of the Foreign Office is absolutely forced, they always do as the Anti-Britishers ask. You see the Anti-British party is noisy and hysterical, and always shrieking that it can command countless votes." Mr. Smith limped across the hut and sat on a green case and emphasized his remarks with a powerful stained forefinger.

"Well," he said, "it's an old game with me, and after all the official kicks I've had I ought to have dropped it years ago. But somehow I couldn't resist the temptation. The King of Okky is our man by geography and agreement. I have made representations to the E. O. till I am sick of putting pen to paper, that he ought to be recognized and patted on the back. They don't even take the trouble to reply, much less carry out the suggestions. Therefore, the French, who have taken hold of the hinterland, have done the obvious thing. They sent down a sort of frontier tin-pot sous-gouverneur, and told him that if he fixed up things all right for France they'd give him a commission and a 500 francs gratuity; and as he'd absolutely no competitors, he naturally did the trick."

"What a beastly shame!" Carter blurted out, and then felt surprised at himself. It was about the first time in his life that the Englishman who was within him had ever peeped out upon the surface.

"I know what the man's expedition cost—practically nothing. I saw the presents he gave old Kallee—£50 would have covered them. And for that, and a mouthful of empty words, he gets half a million square miles of territory, and trade of a present value of £750,000, and a potential value of £750,000, and a low estimate. Well, Mr. Carter, I'm braver than our F. O. I'm going to buck against the Anti-British party, and I'm going to see that we keep in our own hands what rightly belongs to us. I shall be called a pirate, but that doesn't disturb me. I lost all the reputation I had to lose at this same game years ago. I was doing my duty here then in West Africa. A smug little beast of a newspaper man got up in the House of Commons and demanded my dismissal. He would never have been heard of if he hadn't been consistently Anti-British on every occasion when the country was in dis-

agreement with any one else. But it was his dirty line, and it brought him a certain disgraceful notoriety, which was what he was after. He could command votes, or said he could, and the government believed him. They didn't care particularly for England; their only interest was keeping their party in office, and as I was a nuisance, I had to go. It wasn't a case of being actually broke, you must understand, Mr. Carter, but they made things so awkward that I had to send in my papers all the same. They tried the same game with Rhodes, and Curzon, and Milner, the dirty little cunts. They had a man who tries to uphold Great Britain's dignity or give her another acre of territory."

"But here now, thank the Lord, I personally am unofficial, and I'm doing exactly what I know to be best without fear or favor of anybody."

"How far does your territory extend, sir?"

"As far as I can make it," said Mr. Smith dryly.

"Are you going to let it be developed by the white man?"

"Assuredly."

"Then," said Carter, "we shan't clash, and I'm sure you don't give me my passport. I don't know whether the place I am making for is in your territory or the next king's, but I'm going there purely for purposes of development. I tell you frankly, I haven't a bit of ambition at present beyond making a pile. If ever I find myself a rich man I may take a hand in the thankless game you're on at here. But that's in the future. In the meanwhile, if the question is not indiscreet, might one ask if it was a Frenchman you were having that rifle duel with just now?"

"The Frenchman's down with fever. I was exchanging shots with a soldier of fortune, who is, I believe, an old acquaintance of yours. Kwaka his name is."

"Great Christopher! what a small place West Africa is. Old Kallee sent Kwaka down to borrow my head for his collection, and after the way I bamboozled that man I shouldn't have been surprised if he'd been struck off the Okky army list. Did you—er—make a clean job of him?"

"Winged only, I think. He kept very well to cover."

"You were, both blazing away for long enough."

"Well," chuckled Mr. Smith, "I'm afraid he hardly had a fair chance at me. You see, I'd a boy with a trade gun lying under a lot of dozen yards to my right, and I'd a string from my foot to his trigger. When I loosed off the Winchester I pulled the other gun too, and Kwaka shot for the smoke every time, and made very good practice of it. That log would be worth mining for lead."

"When you take the place what shall you do with the Frenchman?"

"Just the same that he would do with me," said the old man grimly. "Now suppose we change the subject. The bush telegraphs have been persistently talking about a white woman who's been upsetting the face of Africa, especially about our factories. Heard anything of her?"

Carter laughed shortly. "Of course I've heard. In fact she's why I'm here. She's Miss Kate O'Neill."

The old man dropped his eyeglass to the end of his ribbon, fumbled for it till he caught it again, and three times tried to screw it in place before he got it fixed. "Kate O'Neill, you say? She'd be about twenty—no, twenty-three years old?"

"I'm a bad judge, but I daresay she'd be about that. Why, do you know her, sir?"

Mr. Smith straightened himself with an obvious effort. "I have not been to England for five-and-twenty years, is it likely? You said she was English, I think?"

"As a point of fact, I did not, though presumably she is English. She was not the late Godfrey O'Neill's real relative. She was adopted, so I heard. But he let her the business for all that, and she's making it hum. She's marvelously able. But, of course, you have seen for yourself more of her efforts than I have, sir."

"I have seen them."

Carter laughed. "I'm afraid you made the same mistake that everybody else made, from Kallee and old Kallee. She's the kind of the kindly, buck-up-and-get-it-done letters. She is the Mr. K. that you chaffed me about at Malla-Nulla for admiring so much as a business man."

"My God!" said Swizzle-Stick Smith, and sat back limply against the wall of the hut, and then "My God!" he said again.

Carter hesitated, an dthen, "Did you," he ventured, "know Miss Kate's own people before the late Godfrey took her over?"

Mr. Smith, with an obvious effort, pulled himself together. "I did, Mr. Carter. Her mother—she—she died. Her father went under. He had a prettily trying time of it first, but when the pinch came he went under most thoroughly. Godfrey O'Neill, good fellow that he was, took the child then, and so she got her chance, and, thank heaven she's used it."

Carter looked at the old man narrowly. "And is the father alive now?"

"But by this time Mr. Smith was his old cool, profane self again. "How the devil should I know? Do you think I keep track of all the failures in Africa? You seem very interested in this young woman yourself. May I ask if you've any aspirations in that direction?"

"If you mean have I any wish to marry her, I can answer that best by telling you that I'm engaged to marry Laura Slade."

"Ah, I see. Well, Mr. Carter, we will drop the subject, which is a painful one to me for many reasons. Let us get on to your personal schemes. In what way can I forward them?"

CHAPTER XV.

TIN HILL: THE MINE.

Tin Hill, when they got to it, carried riches that lay in the view of the sky. The mountain of country rock which held the veins reared up out of the dark green bush, red-streaked and barren, and the last day's march towards it lay through a heavy growth of rubber vines. Even the Krooby could not help noticing these.

"O Carter," he said, "rubber lib for here. Dem Missy Kate she say rubber-palaver beat oil-palaver, an' kernels, an' gum all-e-same coked hat."

"She didn't. Those are my words of

wisdom you've got hold of. Still I admit the sentiments are Miss O'Neill's. But the main thing is, Trouble, that rubber takes capital and labor to handle, and this firm's short of both at the moment. We'll leave rubber to Miss O'Neill for the present."

"O Carter, dem Missy Kate, she no fit for love you now?"

"She no fit," said Carter, with a sigh, "because you savvy I fit for do wife-palaver with dem Miss Laura."

The last marches of All ben Hosslein's road had been little traveled during these latter months of political upheaval, and this meant that the ever-growing bush had encroached, and passage was difficult. Moreover, food was painfully scarce. Swizzle-Stick Smith, out of his scanty store, had given them what he could, but this was soon eaten, and once more they had been forced to fall back on that marvellous thing, the kola nut. But though nibbling kola puts off the desire for a meal, and makes one able to endure prolonged strains, it does not fill gaps in the inside.

Both Carter and the Krooby were very gaunt, and tattered, and savage-looking when at last they arrived at the rock and the river; but the omens seemed to change from that moment.

To begin with, Carter had a snap-shot at a gazelle and brought it down. They lit a fire where they were, ate, and felt the blessedness of being full for the first time for a fortnight. Then, whilst hunting for a site for a hut, they came across a clump of plantains, wild certainly, and coarse, but filling enough to men who had long outgrown any niceties of palate. And at the father side of the plantains what appeared to be a mere cubical mound of greenery disclosed itself upon inspection to be a house.

"Ghosts," whispered White-Man's Trouble, and shrank back.

"I hope so," said Carter. "They'd give us local news, anyway, and might be amusing to talk to. But I never met ghosts outside a story-book, and I'm afraid there'd be none here. I wonder who lived on this spot? Some house, with a lime walls three feet thick and a flat cement roof. Inside area—phew! it smells musty—twenty feet by twelve. No, by Christopher! there's another room on beyond. Store-room that—oh, beg pardon, Mr. Snake. My mistake. Good-after-noon!"

He shot out into the open again by the doorway, and several snakes who resided in the father room made exit by the window.

"When in-doubt as to the authorship of any West African monument, one always puts it down to the early Portuguese," Carter mused, "and we'll leave it at that for the present. Original occupants have been gone any time these last two hundred years. Well, if we strip off these vines and creepers from the outside, and light fires inside to sweeten the air a bit, we shall have the most palatial quarters. The question now is whether there is a mine and whether it is worth working."

But that last point very quickly answered itself. Three great veins of tin-stone sliced vertically into the mother rock. Two of them were forty feet wide, the third was sixty. The face ran up at a steep angle, and a great beer-colored river swilled away at its foot, and underrived it, and with the help of the sun kept chattering screams always cascading down the slope.

"This isn't a mine," Carter shouted exultantly. "It's a quarry! Bring a steamer up alongside here, and every man that works could shovel two hundred sovereigns' worth of ore into her from these dumps each hour without so much as scratching a pick in. Why, the outcrops are scarcely leached at all. When we've worked twenty yards or so into the veins I'll rig a temperley transporter and guy it to these rocks above, and run the stuff straight from where it grew into a steamer's holds. Great Christopher! Kate had better look out; I'm not going to let her be the only millionaire on earth."

"Dem stones with yellow glass on him worth money?" asked White-Man's Trouble.

"Heaps."

"In Liverpool?"

"Well, say Swansea or Cardiff; practically the same thing."

"Id sell you a ton for a fill of tobacco."

"How you get it to coast? You no fit to pay carriers."

"By water, my pagan friend. We make steamship lib for here."

"Steamship no fit," said the Krooby, and spat contemptuously into the yellow stream. "Dem cabbies no savvy way here. Dem rubber no savvy way to Coast."

"That's a bit beyond my linguistic powers. You must translate some more."

"Dem rubber," the Krooby explained patiently, "no fit for run to dem sea."

"Then where the deuce does it run to? Dem a ju-ju drink it?"

"Ju-ju no fit for touch dem rubber," said White-Man's Trouble, making the question literally. "But dem rubber run into dem squidge-squidge, an' lib for die!"

"Runs into a swamp and gets lost! My great Christopher, the odds are you're right. But why in the name of thunder didn't you tell me that before?"

"I no savvy," said the Krooby simply, "where you come. O Carter, I come after you from Mokki because I think you no fit to carry dem bag."

Carter swung around and picked up White-Man's Trouble's hand and shook it heartily. "You've got a very white inside to you," he said.

But the African was not flattered. He pulled away his limp hand as soon as it was set free, and rubbed his abdomen nervously. "O Carter, I no fit for white inside. I no ju-ju boy. I dam common Krooby."

Thence onwards there was impressed on Carter's mind these three great facts: One: He had found a mine of immense potential value. Two: He could never find a water channel down to the Coast. And three: If he couldn't discover that channel himself, no one else would, at any rate for his benefit.

He thought these matters over during one torrid night, and resolved to devote the next day to exploration. He had had predecessors on the place house building predecessors who had left a series of rust-streaks which he translated into mining tools. Presumably they were Europeans. How did they propose to deal with this ore? Smelt it on the spot, or bag it and get it to the Coast?

If they were West African Portuguese of the olden time, he was fully aware that they would be using slave labor for everything, and he tried to figure out if it was possible, even with slave porters, to carry concentrates down to the Coast and leave a sufficient margin for profit. Even with the most liberal estimates he

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